

Being Digital

By Nicholas Negroponte

Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1995

Reviewed by LTC John Lesko (U.S. Army Reserve), a Decision Coach and Group Facilitator for Anteon Corp. Lesko is a member of the Army Acquisition Corps and a frequent contributor to Army AL&T. He can be contacted at John.Lesko@saftas.com.

"Computing is not about computers any more. It is about living. The giant central computer, the so-called mainframe, has been almost universally replaced by personal computers. We have seen computers move out of giant air-conditioned rooms into closets, then onto desktops, and now into our laps and pockets. But this is not the end." With this introduction, Nicholas Negroponte (Founding Director of MIT's Media Lab) begins to explain the wonders of today's multimedia, bit-based technologies. To which this reviewer adds, "No, computing is not about computers anymore. Rather, it is increasingly about working effectively, efficiently, and collaboratively to deliver new, or to sustain current, capabilities for use along the spectrum of security missions, ranging from multinational peacekeeping to joint warfighting."

Being Digital may appear to the pedestrian reader as nothing more than a compilation of Negroponte's 18 favorite essays from *Wired* magazine; however, it is this and more. The author and editors have done a good job of structuring the book into three main parts. The book's table of contents follows:

Part One—Bits Are Bits:

- The DNA of Information ...
- Debunking Bandwidth
- Bitcasting
- The Bit Police
- Commingled Bits
- The Bit Business

Part Two—Interface:

- Where People and Bits Meet
- Graphical Persona
- 20/20 VR [virtual reality]
- Looking and Feeling
- Can We Talk About This?
- Less Is More

Part Three—Digital Life:

- The Post-Information Age
- Prime Time Is My Time
- Good Connections
- Hard Fun
- Digital Fables and Foibles
- The New E-xpressionists

In these three parts, Negroponte describes the evolution of CD-ROMs, multimedia, hypermedia, high-definition television (HDTV), and more. The section on interfaces offers a history on visual interfaces, graphics, VR, holograms, teleconferencing hardware, the mouse and touch-sensitive interfaces, and speech recognition. Finally, Negroponte provides an epilogue entitled *An Age of Optimism*, in which he shares his vision of the future and how one might live in it.

Although this book often delves into the intricacies of binary code, data compression techniques, and the advantages of asynchronous meetings, readers are well served by numerous examples, illustrations, and metaphors that make the book an easy read. This is particularly helpful because the rate of change that occurs with these complex technologies can quickly overwhelm the average cybercitizen/soldier.

Being Digital serves as a guidebook for anyone who wants to understand technological forces that are shaping our bit-based world. Where it falls short, however, is in discussing the impact these technologies will have on transforming data to information, information to knowledge, and knowledge to wisdom. *Being Digital* is heavy on data management and information-based insights and light on integrating these concepts into a larger comprehensible whole.

As the military embraces new technologies that fundamentally change the way it wages war, perhaps the best defense will be a networked offense. Members of the Defense community will continue to wrestle with decisions and trade-offs surrounding today's revolution in military affairs. Missions are likely to be created, re-examined, realigned, and/or eliminated. Bureaucratic battles will inevitably be won, lost, or fought to a draw. National strategy will evolve because it must change with the times. Decisionmakers must be both wired and adept at working with vast amounts of information in today's knowledge-based world. This aggressive, offensive strategy will most likely be shaped by acquisition professionals *being digital*.

First, Break All the Rules

By Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman
Simon & Schuster, New York, 1999

Reviewed by LTC John Lesko (U.S. Army Reserve), a Decision Coach and Group Facilitator with Anteon Corp. Lesko is a member of the Army Acquisition Corps and a frequent contributor to Army AL&T. He can be contacted at John.Lesko@saftas.com.

What do the world's greatest managers do differently than your average manager? According to Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, both from the Gallup Organization's Workplace Management Practice Office, "Before they do anything else, they first break all the rules of conventional [management] wisdom." For example, world-class managers:

- Do not believe that people can achieve anything they set their minds to,
- Do not try to help people overcome their weaknesses,
- Disregard the Golden Rule—playing favorites when it suits the organization's needs,
- And most of all, they have the ability to find, focus, and keep talented employees.

Most folks know of the Gallup Organization for its public opinion polls and surveys. Within the Gallup Organization is a research and consulting arm that has collected and analyzed data from more than 80,000 managers in more than 400 organizations (including for-profit and nonprofit companies and governmental agencies). The authors suggest that this is the largest such study undertaken in the field of management science. *First, Break All the Rules* summarizes this multiyear study and is rich with both data and anecdotal evidence that illustrate best-business practices.

So how might a program manager and/or acquisition executive apply what's in this book? The authors suggest that, "Measuring the strength of a workplace can be simplified to twelve questions. The twelve questions don't capture everything you may want to know about your workplace, but they do capture the most information and the most important information. They measure the core elements needed to attract, focus, and keep the most talented employees."

Questions were scored on a one to five scale with a "1" equaling strongly disagree and a "5" equaling strongly agree. Organizations that scored highest on these questions experienced higher levels of perform-

ance as measured in sales, profitability, and employee retention.

The following are the 12 strength-measuring questions:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

At first glance, this reviewer thought, "This is too easy. These questions are common sense and too simple." But the more I read and thought about the research findings, the more I began to understand the significance of these questions and how one's answers serve as a litmus test for managerial excellence.

Buckingham and Coffman propose that world-class performers must master these managerial issues in a sequential fashion. There is a Maslow-type hierarchy within these 12 questions. That is, first an organizational leader must successfully score high marks on questions 1 and 2. To start, work expectations must be clearly understood and resources made available to all. Then, the answers to questions 3 to 6 reveal an individual employee's self-esteem and sense of worth to an organization. Next come issues associated with establishing a sense of belonging (questions 7-10). And finally, questions 11 and 12 explore the opportunities for individual and organizational growth and learning.

Generally speaking, high-performing groups had the best employee morale and company loyalty. It is interesting to note that high scorers many times were located at the business unit or subdivision level of an organization. In other words, excellence was most likely to be found within a specific profit center, within a small team,

within a single store, and/or within a specific geographic segment of a larger organization.

So what can the Army's acquisition professionals learn from *First, Break All the Rules*? In this reviewer's opinion, there are two key lessons to learn and apply to our day-to-day work. First, we would be well-served to periodically ask our colleagues the 12 questions listed above. This will keep individuals focused on their tasks and on building a cooperative work environment. And second, we should benchmark government practices against internal models of excellence as well as external business organizations. There's plenty to learn from so-called "best-of-breed" or "best-of-class" competitions.

First, Break All the Rules presents a useful measuring stick that links employee opinion and performance to managerial practice. Program managers, acquisition executives, and others should read and apply the fundamentals of this book as they develop, purchase, and/or sustain our warfighting and peacekeeping systems.

The New Dynamic Project Management: Winning Through the Competitive Advantage

By Deborah S. Kezsbom, Ph.D.,
and Katherine A. Edward
John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2001

Reviewed by LTC Kenneth H. Rose (USA, Ret.), PMP, ASQ Certified Quality Manager, a Project Management Instructor for ESI International residing in Hampton, VA, and former member of the Army Acquisition Corps.

Throw away your project management handbooks. Throw away your so-called "bibles" of project management. *The New Dynamic Project Management: Winning Through the Competitive Advantage* by Deborah S. Kezsbom and Katherine A. Edward is the only project management book you'll ever need.

Now, the opinion just expressed is a bit overstated. But in these times of promotional hype, a little excess is warranted. The bottom line is that Kezsbom and Edward's book is a unique contribution in its completeness and clarity, and offers a stand-alone resource of considerable value to project management professionals.

The current volume is an update of a 1989 edition made better by new content and new organization. It includes a new chapter dedicated to quality management. This is appropriate because the authors describe in their first pages the *quadruple* constraint of project management, which adds quality to the traditional three

elements of time, cost, and technical performance. The authors describe an integrated program of quality planning, assurance, and control. They discuss the philosophy and approach of quality gurus Crosby, Deming, and Juran, adding more current views from David Garvin of the Harvard Business School.

A new chapter on procurement and contracting addresses an area that has gained new importance to project managers. The chapter on project management information systems has been redesigned to recognize the prevalence of Web-based technologies in today's tools.

The book begins with a view of the contemporary project management environment. The authors point out that the project manager's role has evolved to include more boundary spanning. The project manager has become "... a common focal point [who] brings the critical elements of a project together and *facilitates* all that needs to be done, *by those who are experts at doing it*, to offset the likelihood of failure" (italics in original). They reinforce the long-standing axiom that projects fail on people matters, not technical matters, with a list of 25 potential sources of project failure collected during 40 years of experience. Communication, priorities, teamwork, and conflict are all included; technical acumen is not.

The authors then march the reader down a progressive path of enlightenment, beginning with project organization. The thoroughness of the chapter on quality is duplicated throughout the journey. That feature is the standout difference between this and other texts that lecture on a superficial level or point to other sources for complete information. Although the book is heavily documented with citations and references for further study, everything the reader needs to get to work may be found between the covers of this singular book.

Planning, scheduling, and controlling all get the full treatment, as expected. The discussion on earned value management is exceptional, even though it uses the traditional acronyms—BCWS (budgeted cost of work scheduled), BCWP (budgeted cost of work performed), etc.—that only recently have been simplified to more user-friendly terms. The authors also give appropriate attention to the precedence diagramming method (where linked boxes show the sequence in which tasks are to be performed) as the successor to PERT [program evaluation and review technique] and CPM [critical path method]. A discussion of methods for controlling project costs, changes, and risks rounds out the presentation of these traditional nuts and bolts of project management.

Leadership, conflict resolution, communication, and teamwork are all covered in an integrated manner that links them together and to the other material in the

book. As always, the authors prescribe very practical approaches that can make a reader better able to execute project management responsibilities, not just be better informed. The sections on negotiation and listening may be especially valuable in today's rich mixture of internal and external stakeholders who can influence project success.

Throughout, Kezsbom and Edward augment their presentation with case studies, exercises, and appendices that demonstrate, clarify, and otherwise add food for thought.

In truth, *The New Dynamic Project Management* may not be the *only* book you need on project management. But it is certainly a one-of-a-kind resource, one that you—apprentice, journeyman, or master—should not be without.

The following poem was written by a recently retired Army civilian employee at the U.S. Army Developmental Test Command, Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD. His farewell e-mail to his many friends and associates indicated that service to soldiers through developmental testing was a big part of his life during his 33-year federal career.

Remembering The Ranges

The guard at the gate with his M16
The 105 firing and the rifling ring's scream
Knocked about by the big mortar's blast

Razor wire around "bugs and gas"
Carry your mask, wear your pass

In steel bombproof we huddle
Awaiting bang of grenade
Against bar-armor bustle

Stay inside until we hear
The whistle blow all-clear

Serving the 155 with broken ram
Crew sweating in summer sun
Loading big rounds by hand
'til the test is done

Cordite and nitro's acrid smell
Nasty stuff, headaches from Hell

Abrams tank and strong young backs
Swinging hammers and changing tracks

Servicing the Abrams always a dread
When trying to park in an M60 shed

Spine taking a beating
Cross-country by jeep
Or on the Huey's
Hard bench seat

Airdrop test load floating down
From high above we hear the sound
The singing of the snapping shroud
Then crashing load in dusty cloud

Firing 25 millimeter on the run
And the deadly 120—a smoothbore gun

PATRIOT missile's soldier crew
Big, rawboned boys, tried and true

Dothan "International" Airport
Red clay roads to Rucker's Fort
On TDY when Mamma died
Next, Fort Huachuca and C4I

Alaskan winter and biting cold
In the lower 48 far below
Sultry swamp and mighty mosquito
Desert heat and dust storms blow
Wasatch Range and high-mountain snow

Block and tackle, crane and cradle
Tanks and towbars, boom-sling and cable
Brothers and sisters, ready and able

Civilian and soldier, side-by-side
Serving our nation, testing with pride.

Richard J. Coski